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SADDLE SONGS

SADDLE SONGS

and Other Verse

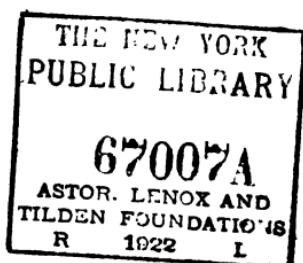
By

Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "Riders of the Stars," "Songs of the Outlands," "Songs of the Trail," etc.



Boston and New York
Houghton Mifflin Company
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1922



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WACKENBACH
CAMBRIDGE
MASSACHUSETTS

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS
PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

TO
EUGENE MANLOVE RHODES

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Acknowledgments are made to the *Popular Magazine*,
the *Adventure Magazine*, *Romance*, and the *Short Story Magazine*, in which certain of these poems have appeared.

SADDLE SONGS

Saddle Songs

• • •

A BRONCO SHOD WITH WINGS

SING me a home beyond the stars, and if the song be fair,

I'll dwell awhile with melody — as long as mortal dare,
But sing me to the earth again on wide, descending wings,

That I may not forget the touch of homely human things.

Nor let my heart forget a friend, or turn from daily toil,
Though scant the measured recompense, the meal, the wine, the oil;

Nor scorn the rugged way I came with hunger pressing hard,
Before I knew the narrow gate or feared the breaking-yard.

The ragged coat, the grinning shoe, the glance bereft of pride,

And would I dare, who trod the mire, to thrust their plaint aside?

My dog's affection chides my soul for that I may not be
One half the loyal gentleman his eyes have mirrored me.

Saddle Songs

The homely things, the human things, the things begat of earth,

And least among them he who scorns the clay that gave him birth:

My horse that nickers in the field and points his slender ears,

Has taught me more of gratitude than all the singing years.

What friends the trees, the soil, the stone, the turning grain, the flower!

House timber, garden, portal-step, bread, fruit, and fragrant hour

When shred, the leaf is touched by fire, draws cool and clear and clean,

And smoky spirals sing the praise of soothing nicotine!

The intimate companionship of saddle, spur, and gun,
The joy of leather, smooth and strong, of silver in the sun,
The grip of trout-rod to the hand, the play of jeweled reel,
The stock that fits the shoulder-curve — the potency of steel!

Forgetting not the rope and hitch, the steaming pack-horse train,

The sliding shale, the ragged pitch, the thunder and the rain,

The smell of coffee in the dawn that gilds the far divide;
Sing me a home beyond the stars — but give me trails to ride.

A Bronco Shod With Wings

And so my friend, because, my friend, our ways lie far apart,

And I may never grip your hand, yet I may reach your heart:

I'll drop the reins and slip the cinch, untie the saddle-strings,

And carve a picture on the rock — a bronco shod with wings.

NAMES

It's when you name Cheyenne or Laramie,
Laredo, Magdalena, San Antone,
You set me thinking of what used to be:
I knew a blue-eyed girl in Laramie —
But, somehow, I just drifted on, alone.

A man got shot in Laramie one night;
It was n't me. I fanned it out of town
And headed South. I reckon I did right —
The Magdalena girl, her eyes were brown.

I did n't know the Southern country then;
I tried it for a year, then came away;
Homesick, I hit the trail for old Cheyenne —
I recollect her eyes were warm and gray.

The sheriff came to town, so I rode South;
For every man, he likes a change of scene —
Laredo? Well, she had a rose-red mouth,
And eyes you could n't read — just cool and green.

Laredo it was heaven, for a spell,
Then hard-times hit the range and work was slack:
I would n't say that San Antone was hell,
But she was Spanish — and her eyes were black.

Names

Some folks they settle down and make a home,
And some keep chasing after fame or gold;
And while it seems I always had to roam,
I'm glad I did n't see their eyes grow old.

So when you name Cheyenne or Laramie,
Laredo, Magdalena, San Antone,
You're making music that sounds good to me;
I knew a blue-eyed girl in Laramie,
But, somehow, I just drifted on, alone.,

BEAVERKILL

As I rode down from Beavertkill one sunny summer day,
I met a horseman on the hill, a rider bent and gray;
The trail was never hard to find — yet he was old and
almost blind . . .

Said he, "And I would take it kind if you would point the
way."

His eyes were agates dipped in milk, blue-dull, their bright-
ness gone,

His hair like thin-spun silver silk from skeins of moonlight
drawn,

His face a lined and scribbled page — his clothes the
wrinkled clothes of age,

Yet in that wistful hermitage his soul was shining on.

I told him that the mountain trail led up to Beavertkill,
And ended at the iron rail, the station and the mill;
I asked him where he wished to go: he smiled, a faint, a
fleeting glow,

And said it did n't matter so he were not standing still.

When questioned of his kin and quest, and where his vine
and tree,

He quavered, "They are all at rest except my horse and me;
And though the way lead up or down, we always find a
friendly town;

If Beavertkill have such renown, it's there that I would be."

Beaverkill

I warned him that the trail was steep, the river swift and wide,

The ridges rough, the cañons deep — that he had best decide

To tarry at my cabin where he'd find a bed and ranger's fare,

And in the evening I'd be there, returning from my ride.

With stiff'ning knees his gaunt cayuse set out against his will;

I made a slackened cinch excuse to watch him up the hill,

Then, riding in to Riley's Post, I wondered if the poor old ghost

Would find a bed before his host got back to Beaverkill.

Dan Riley took me by the sleeve — Dan Riley's face was white —

And told me, whispering, not to leave before the morning light:

He gestured with a shaking hand: "The Tanner boys have ambush planned

To kill you in the timberland below the ford, to-night."

"That talk," said I, "is Tanner's joke — a threat I've heard before;

A little fire, a lot of smoke — a wind that shakes the door."

Saddle Songs

Yet Danny Riley urged me stay; he fetched the cards, we
sat at play . . .

The sun was high upon the way when I set out once more.

"T was at the ford of Beaverkill my pony stopped and
drank.

I read a sign that held me still: along the farther bank,
Where swinging wide the stream comes down, a mile below
the mining town,

I saw a shape in sodden brown — a hand that rose and
sank.

And then I bore a heavy load . . . the meaning of the
sign . . .

The ambush by the evening road mistook his horse for
mine:

Old, almost blind . . . so blindly led to pay the forfeit in
my stead,

And I the host, and this his bed beneath the darkening
pine.

UNDER THE JOSHUA TREE

'WAY out there where the sun is boss,
Under the Joshua tree,
'Long came a man on a played-out hoss,
Under the Joshua tree.

Says he, "I reckon I'm a ding-dang fool
For gettin' het up when I might stay cool:
If you are a hoss — then I'm a mule,"
Under the Joshua tree.

"The sink 's gone dry and the trail 's gone wrong,"
Under the Joshua tree.
"I'm gettin' weak — and you ain't strong,"
Under the Joshua tree.

"As sure as my name is Jo Bill Jones,
We got to quit right here," he groans,
"And the buzzards 'll git our hides and bones,"
Under the Joshua tree.

Now that hoss wa'n't much on family pride,
Under the Joshua tree,
But he aimed to save his ole gray hide,
Under the Joshua tree.

Saddle Songs

He says to hisself: "The world's gone dry,
But there's no sense quittin' while you can try,"
So he cocked one foot and he shut one eye,
Under the Joshua tree.

Bill Jones went crawlin' round and round,
Under the Joshua tree,
Diggin' like a dog in the bone-dry ground,
Under the Joshua tree:

But the hoss stood still on his three feet,
Lookin' like he was plumb dead beat,
Till he seen his chance — and he done it neat,
Under the Joshua tree.

Ole Bill he riz right in the air,
Under the Joshua tree,
And oh, my Gosh, how he did swear!
Under the Joshua tree:

With a hoss-shoe branded on his pants,
He let three whoops and he done a dance,
While the ole hoss waited for another chance,
Under the Joshua tree.

Ole Bill stood up, for he could n't sit
Under the Joshua tree,
And he rubbed the place where the hoss-shoe lit,
Under the Joshua tree:

Under the Joshua Tree

Says he: "By Gum, I'm a-seein' red!
And I'm blink-blank sure that you ain't dead —"
And it wa'n't no cooler for what he said,
Under the Joshua tree.

He forked that hoss like he'd never been
Under the Joshua tree,
His head was thick, but his jeans was thin,
Under the Joshua tree:

He pulled out slow, but he made the ride,
With the ole hoss thinkin' to hisself, inside,
"I put in a kick, and I saved my hide,"
Under the Joshua tree.

There ain't no moral to this here song,
Under the Joshua tree,
If you don't go right you'll sure go wrong,
Under the Joshua tree:

But settin' and lookin' at a ole hoss-shoe,
And figurin' luck will pull you through,
Don't always work — there's hoss-sense, too,
Under the Joshua tree.

DOWN ALONG THE DIM TRAIL

Down along the dim trail, far across the plain,
Rode a waddie singing, heedless of the rain
Rattling on his slicker and dripping from his hat,
Gnawing at the cut-banks and spreading on the flat:

*“Wrangle up the parson, don’t forget the ring;
Throw your fancy saddle on the old red-roan:
If you’re feelin’ lonesome, shake yourself and sing,
When your girl is waitin’, down in San Antone.”*

Gloomy were the tall sticks, gusty was the night,
Mournful was the hoot owl calling from the height,
Chilly was the bed-roll, slender was the flame,
But the happy puncher kept a-singing just the same:

*“Eighty miles behind me and forty more to go,
Forkin’ from the old trail and figurin’ my own:
Baldy’s doin’ noble — but noble’s mighty slow,
When your girl is waitin’, down in San Antone.”*

Trailing from the high peaks ran the morning mist;
Far below, the desert shone like amethyst;
Golden was the dim trail, glowing was the day,
Just the kind of weather for singing on the way:

Down Along the Dim Trail

*“Yonder lies the old town, loomin’ on the sky,
Sleepy as a lizard dreamin’ on a stone:
If you was an eagle, mebby-so you’d fly,
When your girl is waitin’, down in San Antone.”*

Some one saw the rider long before he came;
Some one picked a red rose, some one breathed a name.
Lowered were her dark eyes, bashful, young, and sweet,
When she heard a faint song winging down the street:

*“Mebby-so I’m dreamin’, mebby-so it’s me,
And some one in the sunshine, watchin’ all alone —
Seem your eyes git blurry, like you could n’t see,
When your girl is waitin’, down in San Antone.”*

RIDIN' TO THE BAILE

SAN ANTONE 's a Texas town:

Ridin' to the baile.

Top your hoss and rein him roun',

Ridin' to the baile.

Stars are shinin' big and bright,

Mebby-so a pretty night:

And everybody's feelin' right,

Ridin' to the baile.

Yonder shows the open door,

Ridin' to the baile.

Seems I heard that tune before,

Ridin' to the baile.

Watch 'em steppin', see 'em prance!

Like it was their only chance:

Say, let's show 'em how to dance,

Ridin' to the baile.

Put your pistol out of sight,

Ridin' to the baile.

Act like you was raised polite,

Ridin' to the baile.

Just a nip — and that's enough.

Whee! But that is flamin' stuff!

Ridin' to the Baile

'Nother nip? I call your bluff,
Ridin' to the baile.

Now for steppin' off a Square,
Ridin' to the baile.

What's that ruckus over there?
Ridin' to the baile.

Shucks! We just got started grand,
Now my outfit's made a stand:
'Skuse me while I take a hand,
Ridin' to the baile.

• • • • • • •

That your husband that I sp'iled!
Ridin' to the baile.

Thought you eyed me kind of wild:
Ridin' to the baile.

Shoo! That ruckus wa'n't no fight!
Our boys always is polite:
Why, they wa'n't a gun in sight!
Ridin' to the baile.

Start the music — let 'er squeal!
Ridin' to the baile.

Shake your leg and stomp your heel!
Ridin' to the baile.

Saddle Songs

Swing your pardners! Do-se-do!
Bend your back and bow down low;
Dance till you can't dance no mo',
Ridin' to the baile.

PUNCHIN' DOUGH

COME, all you young waddies, I'll sing you a song,
Stand back from the wagon — stay where you belong:
I've heard you observin' I'm fussy and slow,
While you're punchin' cattle and I'm punchin' dough.

Now I reckon your stomach would grow to your back
If it wa'n't for the cook that keeps fillin' the slack:
With the beans in the box and the pork in the tub,
I'm a-wonderin' now, who would fill you with grub?

You think you're right handy with gun and with rope,
But I've noticed you're bashful when usin' the soap:
When you're rollin' your Bull for your brown cigarette
I' been rollin' the dough for them biscuits you et.

When you're cuttin' stock, then I'm cuttin' a steak:
When you're wranglin' hosses, I'm wranglin' a cake:
When you're hazin' the dogies and battin' your eyes,
I'm hazin' dried apples that aim to be pies.

You brag about shootin' up windows and lights,
But try shootin' biscuits for twelve appetites:
When you crawl from your roll and the ground it is froze,
Then who biles the coffee that thaws out your nose?

Saddle Songs

In the old days the punchers took just what they got:
It was sow-belly, beans, and the old coffee-pot;
But now you come howlin' for pie and for cake,
Then you cuss at the cook for a good bellyache.

You say that I'm old, with my feet on the skids;
Well, I'm tellin' you now that you're nothin' but kids:
If you reckon your mounts are some snaky and raw,
Just try ridin' herd on a stove that won't draw.

When you look at my apron, you're readin' my brand,
Four-X, which is sign for the best in the land:
On bottle or sack it sure stands for good luck,
So line up, you waddies, and wrangle your chuck.

No use of your snortin' and fightin' your head;
If you like it with chili, just eat what I said:
For I aim to be boss of this end of the show
While you're punchin' cattle, and I'm punchin' dough.

FLOWER OF THE NIGHT

Down a dark street where paper lanterns glow,
Like sullen poppies in the ocean mist,
Where pallid faces, fugitive and slow,
Turn in some dusky archway's amethyst,

The Lily of Formosa, Flower of Night,
Leaned from her window, dreaming mystic dreams;
Below, an island schooner's riding-light,
Shattered the sea with burnished golden beams.

The blue and silver of the Orient sky,
Tented the tall masts in the harbor slips;
Up from the shore he came; her happy cry
Wakened the cherished music of his lips.

Beneath her window, hesitant he stood,
While her light footfall fluttered down the stair,
The transient glory of her maidenhood
Lighting her eyes and glimmering on her hair.

"Flower of the Night, where falls the early bloom,
Unheeded in the reek of fevered hours;
Oh, passing fragrance, memoried perfume,
Born in the spring of long-forgotten flowers,

Saddle Songs

Formosa!" Though he spake in alien tongue,
Her heart, her glowing heart could understand
Such music, like a silvery cadence rung
On bells of magic, by a magic hand.

"Flower of the Night, the moonlit shadows fall,
Like lingering kisses on your dreaming eyes;
The slow sea drones along the harbor wall,
A flower upon her breast the low moon lies."

Thus sang her sailor, coming from the deep,
Of love sojourning for a little space
Among the shadows where lost flowers sleep;
Above the pensive beauty of her face,

The while she knew the valleys of delight,
And touched the heights, the deeps of melody,
Till stars grew wistful in the trembling night,
And dawn rode high upon the naked sea.

She begged a farewell gift — the knife he wore;
That noon a silken figure climbed her stair,
Gliding beyond the unresisting door,
To shudder from the crimson lily there.

THE ROUND CORRAL

BUCK YARDLAW in the round corral leaned hard against
the rope,

His rigid muscles bunched from hip to straining shoulder-
slope:

Alone he fought the outlaw horse — a lusty, dusty fight;
Threw him and forced the blind across red eyeballs ringed
with white.

Then let him up and saddled him, caught cinch upon the
swing,

And cautious-swift the latigo slipped binding through the
ring:

Set close the choking hackamore, drew knot and loop to
place,

Stepped back and wiped the running sweat from off his
weathered face:

Swung to the saddle, flicked the blind; then lunge and
plunge and rear,

While rope and rowel strove to break blind hate gone mad
with fear:

Rope slashed and reddened rowel stung: the outlaw
squealed and fell,

And Yardlaw lay, a huddled shape, still, in the round
corral.

Saddle Songs

The morning sun shone on the sage — wide miles of dusty gray;
Shone shimmering on the round corral — on Yardlaw where he lay;
Shone down upon the outlaw horse, red-trembling as he stood
A mockery of conquering man's wild pride and hardi-hood.

Buck Yardlaw raised upon his arm and shaped his mouth to curse
The stirrup where his foot had hung, the sun-swept universe,
The outlaw, and the round corral — when spake a gentle Voice,
While, listening, Yardlaw grinned his pain, nor had he other choice.

“Who rules with love of man for beast need never rule with steel.
Beyond the need of conquering ye ply the roweled heel:
Red-raw ye plough the quivering flesh, or ring the tender jaw:
Subdue or kill! Nor would ye teach the brute a higher law.”

“And I be down,” Buck Yardlaw said, “yet I will stand again,

The Round Corral

And break the bronco to my use or hide myself from men,
There is no law that I've heard tell to use a bronco mild,
But I'll play square if he plays square, or wild if he plays
wild."

"Who rules with love of man for beast . . ." So had the
Voice begun:

Buck Yardlaw wakened to the world, the sagebrush in the
sun;

His body was a rack of pain, his face was set and white;
"We'll try that Higher Law," he said; "perhaps the Voice
was right!"

Then slowly to the horse he came and slowly raised his
hand,

Stopped as the outlaw flinched, but stood as gentle horses
stand,

While Yardlaw loosed the slackened cinch, lifted the saddle
clear,

Watching the fixed and burning eye, the undecided ear.

Each knew the other's fighting pride, unconquered to the
end;

Yet often does the bitter foe become the stanchest friend.
"Of all the broncs I've ever fought, I reckon you're the
best."

And Yardlaw laid a fearless hand upon a fearless crest.

THE COWBOY AND THE CAÑON

“SOME Titan showed his anger when he made
That mark upon the world,” the poet said.
A cowboy, loafing in the cedar shade,
Nodded and rose. “Last night I sort of strayed —
Let’s get a real, wet drink; I’m right near dead!”
The painter smiled and closed a humorous eye.
“We’ll go with you, and drink, before you die.”

The great cleft drew apart as down the rut
Of sand and scattered torrent rock, the three
Plodded in silence. “Some steam-shovel cut!”
The cowboy murmured, swearing soulfully.

Then suddenly the western rampart threw
A shadow in the cañon, cool and clean;
The ragged walls that bulked against the blue
Blotted the living world, while in between
Wavered three pygmies who had once been men;
The miracle of contrast burdening
Their journey with a vision-picture — when
They came upon the mystery of a spring
Flooding a hollowed rock.

The cowboy sank
Prone on the granite, dipped his mouth and drank.

The Cowboy and the Cañon

Grunting he rose, all satisfied, and stood
With boot heel grinding in a mound of sand,
Remarking that the drink was "mighty good!"
Rolling a cigarette with skillful hand,
He puffed content, watching the smoke rings where
They vanished wavering in the slumbering air.

The sunlight and the shadows seemed asleep;
No faintest sound awoke from rim to rim,
Save a thin trickle and the murmuring seep
Bubbling from hidden caverns cool and dim;
Till, from the barren edge against the west,
There thrilled the silvery plaint of some wee bird:
"Dear! Dear! Dear! When shall we make the nest?"
Then came the answer, clear as spoken word,
Out of the dusk across the cañon furled:
"Dear! Dear! Dear! To-day we make the nest!"
And, "Dear! Dear! Dear! How beautiful the world!"

Back in the cow-camp jest and laughter broke
The placid level of the evening cool;
The cowboy, frying bacon, turned and spoke;
"Perhaps you guys will think that I'm a fool,
But while you swallowed that there cañon sight,
A bird got busy with his little song,
As plain as talking, and he had it right!
"Beer! Beer! Beer! But water tastes the best!"
I got it straight, right from the cañon crest . . .
Here come the boys — don't tell — or I'm in wrong!"

SALVADOR

THREE men rode out from Salvador across the desert sand,
And one was withered, old, and gray,
And one was young and mocking-gay,
The third a man who asked the way,
A stranger to the land.

“What name you this?” the stranger asked, as, glancing
far and wide
He sought for track of hoof, or trail, for range or hill to
guide,
Yet saw no haven from the sun, no rest for those who ride.

“The name is branded in your face,” the withered rider
said:

“Fear, Thirst, and Madness, we be three . . .
The rifle slung beneath your knee
Could speak the name — but let it be —
‘The Journey of the Dead.’”

“You gave your word to show the way, nor questioned
whence I came;
And now you know a hunted man — ” the stranger named
a name —

“I follow, to the journey’s end, and sanctuary claim.”

Then Madness, who was mocking-gay, spake with the
stranger’s voice:

Salvador

“I follow where my comrades ride;
Where they abide there I abide,
Well have you chosen us to guide,
You had no other choice.”

Then he who fled the wrath of man, a stranger to the land,
Reined round and gazed toward Salvador, far miles across
the sand,

While Thirst and Madness waited still, hard by on either
hand.

“No other choice,” the stranger said — when far across
the plain

He saw a silver river rise,
And gardens like to Paradise,
While Madness smiled with baleful eyes,
And gave his horse the rein.

Swift smote the hammers of the sun upon the stranger’s
head,

As, nodding to his horse’s pace, reiterant, he said:
“Jornado del Muerto. Aye! The Journey of the Dead.”

Yet Christ, who pities hunted men, knew hunger, thirst,
and dole:

The stranger called upon The Name,
When, rose a cross of living flame,
That slowly vanished as he came
Down to a water-hole.

Saddle Songs

A tale is told in Salvador, when evening stars are bright,
Of one who rode, as from the dead, across the desert night,
A hunted man who had returned to bid his foemen smite:

Who whispered as they shot him down beside the market-place:

“Only my body to the grave;
I have atoned — and He will save;
And I forgive, as He forgave,”

And peace was on his face.

LONE WOLF'S LODGE

THUS spake the Lone Wolf, thus and never turning
From the picture that he made on the cañon rim:
"Out across the Sand Hills my fathers' fires are burning,
Out across the Sand Hills, desolate and dim."

Floating in a pony's mane he drew an eagle feather,
Drew a lodge of bison-hide laced with many thongs:
Said: "My brother, when we go, we'll take the trail together,
I shall paint my pictures and you shall sing your songs."

Straightway I answered him: "Name, and I will follow,
I will ride my white horse and you will ride the roan,
Even to the Sand Hills, over ridge and hollow,
Brothers, we, on many trails, then why the last alone?"

Softly laughed the Lone Wolf: slowly by his magic
Color followed color and the desert of his sires
Grew upon the canvas, desolate and tragic,
And out across the Sand Hills gleamed their hunting
fires.

He painted then a low moon whose silver arrows slanted,
Burning on a white horse, burning on a roan:
Turning from his picture the Lone Wolf chanted:
"Brothers, we, on many trails, then why the last alone?"

Saddle Songs

Fragrant were the tall pines, pleasant was the weather,
Where we shared the hide-lodge laced with many a
thong:
Silent in the lodge door we gazed afar together:
He had made a picture, and I had made a song.

DAN PRICE

DANNY was a young hand working on a farm:
Everybody liked him — no one wished him harm,
Danny saved his money, married Nellie Gray,
Then he took a homestead and tried to make it pay.

Then there came a railroad busting through the land,
Buying up a right-of-way, playing sleight-of-hand:
Danny had n't proved up, so they made it plain
That black was white — by right, they said, of "eminent
domain."

Lost his little homestead, but did n't lose his grit,
Got a job at wiping, — slaving in the pit:
Steady as time-clock, working hard and late;
Got a job of firin' on a local freight.

Danny knew the schedules, and every foot of rail
Down on his division along the iron trail:
Years he labored faithful, thinking steady, when
'Long came his promotion, pulling Number Ten.

Number Ten, the fast train, passenger, express,
Danny knew her habits and failings, more or less:
When she carried boodle, where the boodle went,
And what the railroad owed him, even to a cent.

Saddle Songs

Mighty unexpected Danny set the air,
Slidin' down a long grade — call it "Anywhere,"
Some one climbed the cab-step and made it mighty plain,
That Danny and his fireman were n't handling that train.

The papers said the robber was slender, young, and mild,
That Danny marched ahead of him as scary as a child:
The messenger saw Danny and did n't dare to shoot,
When they cut his car and ran ahead to lift the loot.

Danny was suspected and lost his liberty;
But they could n't get a jury that would n't disagree:
Danny quit the railroad and took to raising grain;
Now who'd suspect a lady of holding up a train?

SONGS OF MEN

To please the pale, æsthetic mind is not our chief desire or
hope,
Nor yet to charm the woman's ear who comes upon this
rhyme by chance;
Our song is loud we-all allow, of spur and rifle, horse and
rope,
Of trail and trouble, wind and sun, and many a crimson
circumstance.

You'll find no noble sentiment, although in every verse
you look;
Nor classic melody entwined about a theme of sob or sigh;
But like the rest we up and went and saw, and what we saw,
we took
To monument our glory-trail and leave a name to know us
by.

We, partners, bought a horse apiece and learned how far a
man may fall
And rise again without the aid of crutches, splints, or angel-
wings:
We learned to save the bacon grease and flop the flapjack,
large or small:
To ride and shoot and punch the dough — drink alkali,
and other things.

Saddle Songs

We learned to throw the diamond hitch and swim a ford
grown impolite;

To rope and tally, brand and cut the steer we wanted from
the herd:

To never call a man a name unless we were prepared to
fight;

This rhyme internal staggers — but you're welcome to
supply the word.

We traveled high, we traveled far, and found a trail or
made our own;

Ate tough tortillas in the heat or thawed our grub at Fifty-
Three;

We dallied at The Klondike bar, or played the wheel in
San Antone;

We locked the door on Vain Regret and, poco pronto, lost
the key.

We crossed the border, drifting down to dark Sonora in
the South;

Bought trinkets for the Spanish girls — and ammunition
on the side —

Made love in old Sonora-town and kissed Romance upon
the mouth;

Blew out a Chola light or two — and then we simply *had*
to ride.

We paid to hear the bottles pop; and paid for silk, chiffon,
and lace;

Songs of Men

Wore tans and gaiters, tinted socks, and graced the side-walks of New York;
Got pinched at Maxim's — bribed the cop, but never learned to quite outface
The early morning looking-glass — so shunned the gown and flying cork.

Of late we've felt the touch of age and found the saddle pretty hard:
Our ponies, too, have lost the stride that once they had when tough and young;
So now we ride the printed page instead of round the caviaryard,
To pick a top-horse here and there — the bronco songs that men have sung.

Oh, bronco songs that pitch and squeal and thrill the heart that pulses red!
Oh, mountain dawn and desert night and tinkle of the pack-horse bell!
The belted thigh, the roweled heel, the unregenerate hope that led
Our eager feet along the trail we loved so long — and love so well!

Old-timers in an ingle-nook we sit and drowse beside the flame;

Saddle Songs

We've stuck together through it all, and dream we live it
all again.

We read the book and read the book and in our hearts we
play the game,

And monument the sunset-trail for those who love the
songs of men.

THE BRONCO

THE bronco's mighty wild and tough,
And full of outdoor feelin's:
His feet are quick, his ways are rough,
He's careless in his dealin's.

Each mornin' he must have his spree,
And hand you plenty trouble
A-pitchin' round the scenery
Till you are seein' double.

Or mebby-so, you think he's broke,
And do a little braggin';
"Plumb gentle hoss!" he sees the joke,
And leaves — with reins a-draggin'.

Or, mebby-so, you think he'll jump
That little three-foot railin':
When all he does is stop and hump,
And stay — while you go sailin'.

But when his pitchin' fit is done,
And ropin', cuttin', brandin',
Is on the bill — I'll tell you, son,
He works with understandin'.

Saddle Songs

At workin' stock he's got his pride:
— Dust rollin', boys a-yellin'
He'll turn your steer, and make you ride,
And he don't need no tellin'.

Perhaps you're standin' middle-guard,
Or ridin' slow, night-hawkin':
And then your bronc is sure your pard,
At loafin', or at walkin'.

Or, when the lightnin' flashes raw,
And starts the herd a-flyin',
He's off to head 'em down the draw,
Or break your neck, a-tryin'.

A bronc he sure will take his part,
At gettin' there, or stayin':
He'll work until he breaks his heart,
But he don't sabe playin'.

He may be wild, he may be tough,
And full of outdoor feelin's:
But he's all leather, sure enough,
And he puts through his dealin's.

SANDY RUE

A GRAY horse in the moonlight, a shadow on the wall;
Like laughter of a soul bewitched, a far coyote's call;
Three horsemen drew beside the gate that took the door-
way light,
And one he called for Sandy Rue to ride with them the
night.

"It's long we've had a word of you and far we made the
ride,
We've waited by The Burning Hill and by the river-side,
Nor once have you come back to curse the places where we
died."

Another spoke — and Sandy Rue put hand upon the gray,
And fumbling gave the horse the bit, nor had a word to say,
As: "So you saddled in the night and rode to shoot me
down,
And still you bear a killer's name in old Sonora-town."

"It's long we've had a word of you; Chiquita's mouth is
cold;
Forgotten is the song she sang, the secret that she told,
Yet you remember, Sandy Rue, the sin you did for
gold."

Saddle Songs

Another voice — and Sandy Rue drew leather through the ring,

And pulled the cincha, made the tie, and gave the rein a fling:

His boot was to the stirrup; then, “You’ve not forgot the knack,

As when we crossed the San Gorgone, but only one came back.

“It’s long from here to San Gorgone, the where you let me lie

Beside the empty water-hole, beneath a burning sky,
Your sin the promise that you gave — and left me there to die.”

Then spoke the first, as Sandy Rue, with swift and cunning hand,

Drew gun and fired at phantom things that gave the dark command;

While spent the shots were lost in space that whistled to their flight,

“Put by the gun and mount your horse; you ride with us, the night.”

The cabin window-panes were red with dawn across the hill,

And Sandy’s cat was curled against the sunlit window-sill,
And Sandy Rue had gone to join the ghosts he could not kill.

Sandy Rue

Beyond his cramped and wasted hand lay Sandy's empty gun,

And so a rancher found him, stark, beneath the desert sun,
Yet not a mark of harm to show, or trace of those who ride,
For trackless are the phantom trails across The Great Divide.

So evil turned upon itself and slew the thing it made;
And simple praise was on the stone where Sandy Rue was laid,
And kindly hearts with desert flowers his lonely grave arrayed.

OVER THE RIDGE AND HOME

WHEN the buck jumps out of the little pines;
— Over the ridge and home —

When the Airedale, tracking the grizzly, whines;
— Over the ridge and home —

Then pack your kill to a hunter's song:
“The trail to the lodge is hard and long,
But we got our meat — and we're going strong
Over the ridge and home.”

When the bull moose trumpets his call to fight;
— Over the ridge and home —

When the elk of the upland top the height;
— Over the ridge and home —

Then pack your kill to a hunter's song:
“The trail to the lodge is hard and long,
But we got our meat — and we're going strong
Over the ridge and home.”

When the flag is set for the caribou;
— Over the ridge and home —

When the big-horn staggers against the blue;
— Over the ridge and home —

Over the Ridge and Home

Then pack your kill to a hunter's song:
"The trail to the lodge is hard and long,
But we got our meat — and we're going strong
Over the ridge and home."

When the dogs are bunched on the lion's track;
— Over the ridge and home —
When the wolf of the timber leaves the pack;
— Over the ridge and home —

Then pack your kill to a hunter's song:
"The trail to the lodge is hard and long,
But we got our meat — and we're going strong
Over the ridge and home."

So once again let a health go round:
"Here's to rifle and pack and hound,
And here's to The Happy Hunting Ground
Over the ridge and home."

SIGN-TALK

MOCCASIN-SHOD, and his dusky hair silvered with rain,
Ni-tan-man-kwi-i, The Lone Wolf, made gesture of
greeting:
Hard riding; the night, and a galloping horse on the plain,
A camp in the hills — thus the journey that led to our
meeting.

He flung himself close to my fire and in silence he lay,
His gaze on the embers — his dark eyes were somberly
dreaming.
The shadows fell swiftly, and swift on the wind went the
day.
In the firelight his blanket and rain-sodden shoulders
were steaming.

“Lean hunger kept pace with your ride over desolate
sands,”
So I told him, endeavoring pictureful words without
speaking.
He nodded and smiled; then a swift, graceful turn of his
hands;
“Yet riding is better than walking — and finding, than
seeking.”

Sign-Talk

“Your horse,” I made sign, “he is out in the night and the storm.”

The Lone Wolf’s quick fingers were laced in the form of a tipi,

Then twinkled as grass that is growing. “Round-bellied and warm,

He stands in your stable, head-nodding” — plain sign-talk for “sleepy.”

We ate by the fire, as of old. We had made many fires
On the trail and the hunt; in the lodge when the rough
winter weather

Was wild as the spirit that surged through his warrior
sires —

Many moons, many suns since The Lone Wolf and I rode
together.

Once he found me outworn in the desert — a chattering
ghost;

He had given me water and fought my hot frenzy of
drinking;

Helped me up to his horse, led the long, weary way to the
post.

A fillip of chance made us brothers . . . The embers were
sinking.

He read in my eyes that our youth was the theme of my
thought.

Saddle Songs

He touched his breast lightly, then, closing his finger-tips, hollowed

A cup — thus he imaged a memory suddenly caught
From the chasm of years that divided the trails we had
followed.

He slept by the fire while the roar of the wind and the rain
Died away to a whisper. I woke with the dawn; it was
snowing.

I saw from the portal a rider far out on the plain.
He was gone. On the hearth a dim ember was fitfully
glowing.

THE REATA

FERNANDO slowly plaited close the long, strong rawhide strands;

Inch by inch the stout reata grew beneath his horny hands
As he sang a Spanish love-song — sang until his work was done,

Knotted in the woven honda, when the shadow of his son,
Young Miguel, crossed to the patio, paused and stood beside his sire,

And the new, smooth-coiled reata filled his heart with keen desire.

Old Fernando took the olla from the shadowy pepper-tree,
Drank the fresh, cool water slowly, sighed and most contentedly

Rolled a cigarette and smoked it — blew a ring within a ring,

Said: "You like the new reata? It is yours, if you will sing
That old song your madre taught you; song and singer, years ago

Silent . . ." Then the old song in the sunlit patio:

"More swift am I than the flash of wings!

Stronger am I than steel!

Luck to the hand that my fleet coil flings,

Saddle Songs

Mine is the song that my master sings,
Rounding me reel on reel.

“What of the herd were it not for me,
The reata, lithe and light?
What of the horses that break and flee
To the hills in the starry night?

“Swift they may flee, but the swifter I
Leap to the running steer,
Or loop a foot as the ponies fly,
When ye may not come as near.

“I, the reata, fold on fold,
Coiled and uncoiled again;
Swift as the serpent to strike — and hold
In the dust of the branding-pen.

“Yea, you may jingle your bright bell spur,
Your conchas like stars may shine,
As you proudly ride past the eyes of her . . .
But the soul of it all is mine.

“For I earn the gold; with the same ye buy
Saddle, serape, spur,
Sombrero and steed, but the king am I,
As ye ride past the eyes of her.”

The Reata

Old Fernando Ruiz wove it, drawing close the rawhide
strands,

Inch by inch the stout reata grew beneath his horny hands:
With a song Miguel had won it; with a song he rode away,
While Fernando in the shadows dreamed of faces brave
and gay.

TWITTERING BILL

He was seldom seen in the desert town,
Except when he punched his burro down
And packed some grub in each worn kyack,
Throwing a hitch with a handy knack;
And hardly a word as he went his way
Drifting out of the living day
Into the spaces, wavering, dim,
That seemed to open their arms to him.
But he never failed, as he jogged along,
To whistle a wonderful, wild-bird song;
Trill and chirrup, triumphant, shrill;
Chirrup and trill, prolonged and sweet,
Followed him down the desert street;
Twitter and plaint, reply and trill,
And he went by the name of "Twittering Bill."

I rode where the rock was piled and tossed
Clear to the crest — the trail was lost.
Shin-tangle and shale, it was thick and tough
That I found on the down-side, steep and rough;
And here and there was a burro track,
And 'way in the bottom a little shack,
Sheltered by shadowy pepper-trees,

Twittering Bill

Till a fellow could almost feel the breeze
Fanning the heat from the burning air,
As he looked at that cool, green spot, down there.
Flowers, yellow and red and white,
And blue flowers catching the lower light,
Till it eased my eyes just to look and look
At that Garden of Eden picture book. . . .
Then I ambled down from the hillside heat,
Watching close where I put my feet,
When, into the picture, straight and still
And full man-size, stepped Twittering Bill.

“How!” said Bill, and his big, red paw
Closed on mine like the grip of Law.
He made a fire and we had some chuck,
Then he led me down where he found his luck.
There was the black sand in the creek,
And flakes of the real stuff, plenty thick,
But instead of sluicing the water through
To riffles, like all folks used to do,
He ran it down by an easy pitch,
In a kind of an irrigating ditch,
To the garden stuff — every plant and flower —
Wasting a sight of that water power. . . .
I was wondering just what the place would pay,
When I heard a twittering, far away,
And a whistling answer — a wild-bird tune;
Bill smiled; “My friends will be coming soon.”

Saddle Songs

I listened for jingling bits and spurs,
And a whoop from desert adventurers;
Instead, from over the southern hill,
Flames of gold flew, twittering, shrill,
At first no bigger than bumble-bees;
Then yellow birds — till the pepper-trees
Turned to musical scores unrolled
In melodious, fluttering notes of gold.

Twittering Bill stood a right long while,
A dream in his eyes — his bearded smile
Changing the look on his homely face —
Changing that shadowy garden-place,
Till it seemed the center of time and space.
And how long we stood is a guess with me;
For I could n't hear and I could n't see
Things as they were when I first came down.
I knew there were shadows, long and brown,
With patterns of sunlight drifting through,
And over it all a world of blue,
As Twittering Bill grew big and strange,
In the woof and web of the light and change.
His beard grew silvery, long and white,
And he wore a robe that was silver-bright;
A river flowed from his upraised hand
And fell like rain on the hungry sand;
Fell and rippled; before it sank,
The flowers bent to the earth and drank,

Twittering Bill

And the trees were bowed in the sunset rays,
And the air was filled with a song of praise.

In his other hand was a branch of green,
That grew and spread till the twilight scene
Dimmed as the crimson, sunset bars
Closed — and the sky was flecked with stars.
The valley dusk was a velvet hush,
Except for the soft and rippling rush
Of water, down from its mountain-hold —
Water that turned the world to gold!

The birds were still when I topped the steep;
The valley below was a song asleep.
I had clean forgotten my old cayuse,
And in fumbling round for a good excuse,
I found a thought as I rode the night;
There's something in using the whole world white;
So I set to whistle and made a plan
That had nothing to do with a pick or pan.

I'm not a warbler, by any means,
It was Bill for the birds — and me for beans.
We shook, and he held to the stakes he drove,
And plenty of water to keep his grove
Smiling; but down where the valley spreads,
I built my stable, corral, and sheds;

Saddle Songs

Strung my fence and located there,
And got the valley to blooming fair;
And whenever I'm lonesome, over the hill
Are the trees and birds, and Twittering Bill.

THE LOST RANGE

ONLY a few of us understood his ways and his outfit queer,
His saddle horse and his pack-horse, as lean as a winter
steer,

As he rode alone on the mesa, intent on his endless quest,
Old Tom Bright of the Pecos, a ghost of the vanished West.

His gaze was fixed on the spaces; he never had much to say
As he jogged from the Rio Grande to the pueblo of Santa
Fé;

He favored the open country with its reaches clean and
wide,

And called it his "sagebrush garden — the only place left
to ride."

He scorned new methods and manners, and stock that was
under fence,

He had seen the last of the open range, yet he kept up the
old pretense;

Though age made his blue eyes water, his humor was
always dry:

"Me, I'm huntin' the Lost Range, down yonder, against
the sky."

That's what he'd say when we hailed him as we met him
along the trail,

Out from the old pueblo, packing some rancher's mail,

Saddle Songs

In the heat of the upland summer, in the chill of the thin-spread snow . . .

Any of us would have staked him, but Tom would n't have it so.

He made you think of an eagle caged up for the folks to see,
Dreaming of crags and sunshine and glories that used to be:
Some folks said he was loco — too lazy to work for pay,
But we old-timers knew better, for Tom was n't built that way.

He'd work till he got a grub-stake; then drift, and he'd make his fire,

And camp on the open mesa, as far as he could from wire:
Tarp and sogun and skillet, saddle and rope and gun . . .
And that is the way they found him, asleep in the noonday sun.

They were running a line for fences, surveying to subdivide,
And open the land for homesteads — “The only place left to ride.”

But Tom he had beat them to it, he had crossed to The Other Side.

The coroner picked his jury — and a livery-horse apiece,
Not forgetting some shovels — and we rode to the Buckman lease,

Rolled Tom up in his slicker, and each of us said, “So-long.”
Then somebody touched my elbow and asked for an old-time song.

The Lost Range

Tom was n't strong for parsons — so we did n't observe
the rules,

But four of us sang, "Little Dogies," all cryin' — we gray-
haired fools:

Wishing that Tom could hear it and know we were stand-
ing by,

Wishing him luck on the Lost Range, down yonder, against
the sky.

OLD BILL

YOUNG SAM went broke and hoofed it out of town,
When, on the mesa trail, came riding down
His partners of the range, a cowboy crew,
Rough-witted, ready-fisted, tough and true,
But bound to have their joke — and Sam was it,
And did n't like their talk a little bit.

“How, Sam? You took to walkin' for your health?
Or mebby-so you're lookin' for yore wealth,
Prospectin' like, and gazin' at the ground;
Good-luck, old-timer — when you git it found!”

Another puncher turned as he rode by
And made a show of dealing, low and high,
But never said a word — while Sam, he cussed
And watched his outfit kicking up the dust.

Sam wished he had some dust safe in his kick.
Last night he'd spread his wages pretty thick
In town — and he'd seemed to overlook.
A gambler from The Dalles promptly took,
Even to young Sam's outfit, horse and gun,
Then Sammy quit because his dough was done.

Yet, as that cavalcade of punchers passed,
Old Bill, the foreman, and the very last

Old Bill

To pose as a Samaritan, came by,
A sort of evening twinkle in his eye,
Pulled up and told the youngster what he thought
About the easy way that he 'd been caught:
Called him more names, with adjectives between,
Than ever had been either heard or seen
Till then — then slowly finished, "which, my son,
Was comin' to you. Now you've had yore fun,
Take this here lead-rope."

Sam he mouched across:

"I see you done that gambler for my hoss."

Bill nodded — once — and slowly rolled a smoke:
"Yes. That there Dalles gent would have his joke;
He run five aces on your Uncle Bill,
But he ain't runnin' now. He's keepin' still."

Sam gazed at Bill with wide, astonished eye;
"You plugged him!" Bill just gazed across the sky
And pulled the flop of his old Stetson hat.
"Well, son, there's some alive would call it that.
Jest fork your hoss, set straight, don't bow yore head,
Or tell the boys a gosh-durned word I said.
Come on! *Yo're* livin' yet, and you are young;
But you'll be older, next time you git stung."

Bill drew his gun — poked out an empty shell,
And Sam rode thoughtful-like, for quite a spell.

RENEGADE

WHEN Carmen sang in Sandoval, that summer night in
Sandoval,

Vaqueros drank tequila with Rurales from the South,
While scornful of the show they made a somber Gringo
renegade,

Watched dark Felipe as he played — and Carmen's
saucy mouth.

An insolent adventurer, he tossed a golden coin to her;
Significant bravura as he read her languorous eyes,
Her glance a subtle message fraught with warning swift
and swiftly caught;
“The loot is much, a Gringo naught — to-night the
Gringo dies.”

The music ceased, the song was done. He heard a little
whisper run,
Like wind along the desert sand — a sinister murmuring;
Rising he crossed the crowded floor — a Rural barred him
from the door;
“El extranjero leaves before he hears the Carmen sing?”

Like the culebra's vicious stroke, the Gringo's hand spat
flame and smoke . . .

Among the horses in the dusk he snatched a hanging rein,

Renegade

Leapt to the saddle, spurred to flight, his farewell whistling
down the night . . .

One staggered in the doorway light . . . ahead the starlit
plain.

From valley trail below the pass he saw the dawn's bright
legions mass,

And march across that barren land, their lances tipped
with fire,

While following with lunge and leap, foam-breasted horses,
breathing deep,

Bore down the wild and winding steep their riders' hot
desire.

Lone, unbefriended, fugitive, the spur of hate, the will to
live,

Fought for a vantage, wearing down interminable miles;
The sly coyote's leisure feigned — a pace unurged, a pace
sustained,

By craft of grim restraint he gained far lava-strewn defiles.

Fronting that purple-shadowed maze of riven wall and
trackless ways,

The gaunt Rurales held aloof; to trail the Gringo then
Meant empty saddles, empty hand, against the threat of
ambush planned

Deep in that unremembering land, the haunt of missing
men.

Saddle Songs

With taunt of curse and fist outflung the riders of Sonora
swung

From futile chase to present need, the distant desert
sink,

While he with slow, enduring pace sought for an ancient
meeting-place,

Known to the outcasts of his race, where stolen horses
drink.

Dawn found him far across the line where homely cabin
windows shine

On acres spread with deep'ning green . . . the cotton-
woods, the shade,

Beneath the flag he had defamed, his warring soul un-
touched, untamed . . .

And Carmen, sleeping, softly named the Gringo rene-
gade.

CLOSED FOR THE NIGHT

I saw the midnight shadows twist
Along the warehouse wall;
I smelt the warm, dank river mist,
And I heard the long road call:

I saw the sweating doorways frown,
“Closed for the night,” they read.
And, “It’s time to beat it out of town,”
The muttering arc-light said.

I heard a night bull bounce his stick,
Slouching along his beat;
I made for the alley shadows quick,
Till he turned to another street;

Then I slung my roll and I hit the trail
That the blanket-stiffs all know;
Switchlight, siding, block and rail,
The boulevard of the Bo.

I breathed the summer fields, and then
I burrowed a stack of hay:
I dreamed that same old dream again,
And I heard the foreman say,

Saddle Songs

“Guilty, your honor!” quick and clear;
I took it, with no appeal,
For the sake of a friend who was there to hear,
And who knew that I would n’t squeal.

Old stuff? And never a friendly word
From him as he played the swell;
Married and wealthy, so I heard,
While I sweated his trick in hell.

Twenty years — and they set me free,
And I’ll say that they broke me right:
Then Luck she handed the ace to me,
When I met him alone, one night.

Down at the wharf where the schooners lie,
And the dock-hands match for beers,
He took his last look at the sky,
And paid for my twenty years.

I saw the sweating doorways frown,
“Closed for the night,” they read.
And, “It’s time to beat it out of town,”
The muttering arc-light said.

THE BLANKET-STIFF

MEBBY I made the Big Mistake, and mebby I changed my name:

Hobo, Willie, or Blanket-Stiff, the monaker's all the same:
Moses was high in politics and Aaron at sleight-of-hand,
But both of 'em had to hit the grit to get to the Promised Land.

If they could have seen the U.S.A. a-stretchin' from coast to coast,

They'd 'a' made a couple of plans to stay, and set up a tradin'-post:

But their folks are here and they're gettin' rich, just pilin' it up in stacks,

And bowin' down to the Golden Calf while dodgin' their income tax.

Now some of the wanderin' Wops I've met, they claim they could clean the slate,

And set up a brand-new government — as if they could run it straight!

They'd maul our laws with their dirty paws and stick 'em behind the shelf:

And, honest, I never talked to one that was able to run himself.

Saddle Songs

'Most any man can choose his lay; go crooked or work or roam,
But the guy that's wise will save his breath for bringin' the bacon home:
Me, I'm a Bo — that lets me out; but a Hobo ain't a bum:
This country is good enough for me — and it's too dam' good — for some.

And where is a guy that can make a law that another guy can't break?

It's nothin' new for Esau's stew to be swiped by his brother Jake:

Then Esau moans as he picks the bones and cusses his birthright blue,

But the guy that's wise just bats his eyes — and goes huntin' another stew.

"We buy our beef from the Argentine, and our clothes from across the pond,

And shoes are so high they are only wore by those in the Great Beyond";

But the bums I've met were wearin' shoes, and clothes that was good enough,

And none of 'em ever starve to death, though mebby their chow is tough.

You say if I talked to my pals like that, that mebby I'd do some good?

The Blanket-Stiff

What, scatter my pearls before those swine — and never
be understood?

Ho Bo is Latin for “honest man” . . . but Latin it ain’t my
lay:

And mebby I made the Big Mistake, but To-morrow’s
another day.

I chuckd my bundle of old regrets along with the big word
“if,”

And my new degree is plain N.G. — I’m a ramblin’
Blanket-Stiff:

So it’s down the iron trail for me, in the early mornin’ sun,
For the woods are green and the fields are green and the
April rains are done.

FLOTSAM

RAIMENT? Scant for that windy weather!
Food? They were used to the hunger pinch:
He and his gaunt gray dog, together,
Sharing their luck to the last frayed inch.

Bandy's dog, on its quivering haunches,
Watched the flame of the firelight play:
Whined, because of their empty paunches:
Then, in the dark, he stole away.

Bandy stared: "Well, so-long, old fellow!
Guess we were drawing it pretty fine:
Never figured that you'd show yellow,
Yet, heaps of luck to you, pal o' mine!"

Past the fields and the wind-break, hiding,
Shadow of shadows the gray dog crept:
Past a huddle of low roofs gliding,
Past the house where a rancher slept.

Hunger doubled the gray dog's cunning,
Fear was ridged on his shaggy hide:
Flutter of wings — and a shape came running
Over the fields to the lone fireside.

Flotsam

Bandy did n't say: "What the dickens!"

But something meatier, far, instead;
As the dog dropped one of the rancher's chickens
And licked his chaps of their flecks of red.

Sniffled at the swift-plucked feathers burning:
Shivered with hunger and joy and cold:
Watched the fowl on a wood-spit turning
Over the embers of red and gold.

A leg apiece was their first, warm ration,
A wing apiece — If a dog could laugh!
And he grinned at his master's hesitation,
As they shared the white meat, half and half!

Yet better than all was the arm around him,
And; "Say, old fellow, I got you wrong:
Your boss is a selfish beast, confound him!
Pals forever — and that's our song!"

Bandy dreamed of a hoard of riches,
Golden flagons and forms of grace:
But the gray dog dreamed of fields and ditches,
A fagot fire — and his master's face.

STALWART'S HOUSE

THE STALWART fashioned a house,
Framed on a mighty plan;
Set where the tall blown trees carouse
With the cloudy caravan
That hastens across the hill,
Buffeted, tumbled, rolled,
Gypsy clouds with the loot of dawn,
Amethyst, jade, and gold.

Blue was his roof-tree high and wide;
Morning his open door
Fronting a green banked riverside,
And the warm brown earth, his floor:
His pillars were mountain trees,
Sturdy and straight and tall;
His garden ponds were the seven seas,
And the mountains his garden wall.

The meadowlark at morn,
Sang up from her grassy nest:
At dusk the whip-poor-will forlorn,
But he loved the wild wind best:
There sang a man's own song,
Lusty and high and free . . .

Stalwart's House

**His garden walk was a river long
That led to the open sea.**

**For threescore years and ten,
He lived and he loved his home,
Keen for the hunt and the songs of men,
And the ways of men who roam:
The Keeper took the key;
Then the stalwart builder cried:
"May he love it as well who follows me!"
So he laid him down and died.**

THE TRYSTING TREE

Oh, some day you 'll grow young again and love the little
faces
That hid among the hollyhocks and sunned their golden
wings,
When you were boy and whistled gay adown the morning
spaces,
Nor knew you trod the meadow-bloom, and tiny creeping
things.

So old, so old, and young again? The pasture field is bar-
ren,
The sedge is yellow in the drift, the naked tree is dumb;
So old? And yet the spring awaits the winging of the heron,
The waking of the willow bud, the forest-murmur,
"Come!"

No wing shall flutter as you pass and none shall know your
going,
The sheep beyond the fallow land, the kine along the
stream;
Light, lighter than the silver mist across the hedges blow-
ing,
Your footfall on the early ways — the dreamer and the
dream.

The Trysting Tree

The trysting tree whose shadow knew the love you would
be telling,

When all the world was in her eyes and school an hour
away,

Is old, so old; yet in the sun the maple buds are swelling,
And still the name you carved is there, though dull
against the gray.

Your feet shall fall as soft as light along remembered places,
When years have made you young again to seek the
trysting tree;

Then may you find the face you loved among the vanished
faces,

As you shall heed the meadow-bloom nor crush the
golden bee.

OLD JIM

BLACK thunder rolled along the mountain-height,
The lightning lashed in whips of burning white
Across the towering pines. Keen, biting, cold
The rain, torrential, smote the mountain-hold:
Quick streams danced down the steep, ripped through
the trail,
Loosing the tilted rock and hillside shale.

“We can’t turn back,” the forest ranger said;
So getting from his horse, he slowly led
The way across a narrow, rocky shelf,
A risk for both — yet he went first, himself;
Testing each step to gain the other side,
He heard above the storm the rumbling slide,
Felt the world tremble, dropped the tightened rein,
Then, plunging, rolling, felt a thrust of pain,
Then nothingness.

Awaking to the day,
Half-buried in the rocky slide he lay,
And knew the freshness of a little breeze;
Saw the bright rain drip slowly from the trees,
Watched the long, western shadows softly fall
Across a sunset-cañon’s gilded wall;
Thought of his horse, and summoned will to rise,
Sank back with hot pain branded in his eyes,

Old Jim

Then, with his white lips twisted tense and grim:
“I wonder where the landslide left Old Jim?”

As though in answer to his murmured thought,
He heard the tinkle of a rein-chain; caught
The sound of slipping shale and plodding feet,
Nor ever heard a melody more sweet.

“Jim!” he called hoarsely. “Can you make it, Jim?”
Then, like a dream, his horse limped down to him.
Gashed by the rock and streaked with darkening red
The old horse stood and slowly moved his head,
Nuzzling the limp hand lifted tremblingly,
His great eyes glowing deep with sympathy.
He knew his rider helpless, so he stood,
— A duty taught by toil and hardihood,
The motto of the Service — Loyalty!
“It’s up to you to go get help for me”:
So spake the ranger. Old Jim seemed to know,
Yet waited for direct command to go.

Down the rude steep, slow plodding through the night
He found his way. He saw the cabin light:
Sniffed at the gate with nostrils round and tense,
Struck with his forefoot at the Station fence,
Then neighed his challenge, loud and high and shrill.
Light-blinded for an instant — stiff and still
He stood.

“Ed’s horse!” The valley ranger said:
And then: “The storm — the old cliff-trail — and Ed?”

Saddle Songs

Without command the old horse led the way
Back through the night to where his rider lay
Pinned by the rock and shale. Thirst-ridden, weak,
Ed heard his name, but had no strength to speak.
"Jim, are you there?" he whispered to the night,
Following with feverish glance the lantern-light,
The shadowy figure laboring at the rock . . .
The clink of steel — and then the sudden shock
Of movement. Oh, the merciful release
Of stupor and an endless dream of peace!

Out of the dream he drifted to the light
Of noonday in the cabin. Swathed in white
He lay, a sorry jest for blithe Romance,
Yet every bit as good a sport as Chance.

He saw the sunlight through the open door,
Saw the far green across the valley floor:
Heard voices in the yard: "The fracture . . . shock . . ."
Then murmured to himself: "You said it, Doc!"

"And he can thank his stars . . ." the voice was grim:
"He's 'way off," murmured Ed. "I'm thankin' Jim."

THE DARK STREET

Down along the dark street I heard a stroller sing,
And well I knew the gypsy hand that thrummed the silver
string;

An old song, a sweet song that came across the sea:
“In Romany the nightingale, and far my love from me.”

Eulalia stood beside me and touched the window-bar;
Eulalia’s eyes were deep with dreams, and yonder shone a
star:

She sighed to hear the old song, a song of wizardry:
“Oh, moonlight in Zamora, and far my love from me.”

“The nightingale is singing, a thorn against her breast,
The leaves lie on the long road and empty is the nest:
The wind is in the poplars — Zingara folk are free!
Oh, firelight in the hollow, and far my love from me.”

Then empty was the dark street and hushed the gypsy tune,
On sea trail and shore trail there burned a summer moon:
Eulalia beside me was singing wistfully:
“Oh, roses of Zamora, and far my love from me.”

A tear was on her dusky cheek, yet love was in her eyes,
The memory of a lost love, the love that never dies:
“Oh, nevermore the long road that leads to Romany!”
Eulalia was singing — yet far my love from me.

ROLL ON, OLE RIVER

De river swash from bank to bank;

Shine on, my soul.

De Natchez Belle she bus' a plank;

Shine on, my soul.

De lightnin' zip an' de thunder roar;

Shine on, my soul.

De Natchez Belle she run ashore;

Shine on, my soul.

De Cap'n cuss and de deck-han's moan;

Shine on, my soul.

But I got some business of my own;

Shine on, my soul.

De wind talk big and de night am dark;

Shine on, my soul.

I ain't got time to buil' no ark;

Shine on, my soul.

Fust come de roof ob de Jedge's stoop;

Shine on, my soul.

Den floatin' along come a chicken-coop;

Shine on, my soul.

Roll On, Ole River

I jes' reach out and I step on boa'd;
Shine on, my soul.

I hang on fas' an' I praise de Lohd;
Shine on, my soul.

She waller aroun' an' we bump dat tree;
Shine on, my soul.

An' I climb to de top, whah I wan' to be;
Shine on, my soul.

Dat chicken-coop she sure is wreck';
Shine on, my soul.

But I got dat rooster by de neck;
Shine on, my soul.

Den de Lohd says: "Pray an' you'll see lan';"
Shine on, my soul.

But I can't pray wif jes' one hand;
Shine on, my soul.

So I hang on fas' till de sun it shine;
Shine on, my soul.

Dat rooster he daid, but he sure am mine;
Shine on, my soul.

*Roll on, ole river,
Mighty river, roll:
Shine on forever,
Shine on, my soul.*

THE ANSWER

A LAD with longing in his eyes, yet neither sad nor gay,
Came shyly to my hermitage and said he'd journeyed
far

To find me: that *one favor* he would like to ask that day.
I said, "My boy, just take one chair — accept just one
cigar."

He blushed — and I was glad to see the goodly color run
From youthful throat to honest brow, a wholesome,
hearty flush.

"I did n't think" — he thus began — "that you cared
much for fun,
Your poetry is often sad." Then *I* began to blush.

"The question — that's the point," I said. He hesitated,
smiled.

"Well, sir, I want to learn to write — I'm taking Eng-
lish now,

I'm reading Keats, and Metchnikoff and Shaw and Oscar
Wilde;

I thought, perhaps, that if — that is — if you would tell
me *how*.

"When does real inspiration come? And do you work at
night?

The Answer

For instance, I have read your songs of wandering —
they're great!

And did you ever shoot a man or mix up in a fight?

And have you been a cowboy; or a Hobo on a freight?

“You write about Sonora girls, and horses, dogs, and men
I'd like to meet; and Southern seas where coral atolls
gleam;

Now, are they real? And have you sailed and tramped and
starved, and when

Did you find time to do it all? To me it's like a dream.

“How should a poet end a song and how should he begin?
Of course it's easy, once one gets a start — of that I'm
sure.

And should a hero only smile, or should he sometimes grin?
And should a villain always die, and heroines be pure?

“If you would tell me how it's done — the formula, you
know,

The scheme, that subtle something that's behind the
writer's art —

I'm certain all I need is time; I've read a lot, and so
I think I understand a bit, if I could get a start.”

“You're going to get one now,” I said, “but not the kind
you mean.

My answer will be simple and it comprehends the whole.

Saddle Songs

Forgive me if I seem abrupt; I'll put it straight and clean:
I could n't tell you *how* to write to save my blessed soul.

“Poverty, Romance, Love and War, Disease and Durance
Vile;

These stock conditions often help to fire, inspire, or
break 'em,

The writer-men; and all aside from how or why or style,
Money and skill may advertise, but only God can make
'em.”

DON CARLOS

To DR. CHARLES F. LUMMIS

I KNOW a home built round a lordly tree
Where silver fountains glimmer in the moon;
A spacious hall of wit and minstrelsy,
Of stately saraband and rigadoon:
Where wisdom wears the garments of delight,
Where ballad, lyric, Andalusian grace
Enchant the portals of the summer night . . .
So reigns Don Carlos in his dwelling-place.

A gracious monarch, who, provoking mirth,
Knows the pure joy of unsought recompense,
For he is of the sun, the sea, the earth,
Vigor and warmth and friendly common sense:
Nor is there angle, buttress, vega, stone,
Corbal or archway, tile or bartizan,
An alien to his creed — does not intone
The heart-song of the builder, and the man.

Youth loves him, that his years, forever young,
Outwing the flight of his own Argosies,
Deep-laden with bright treasures, there among
Historic jewels, tomes, and golden keys

Saddle Songs

Unlocking secrets of forgotten things,
Love-songs and war-songs of an ancient race,
Lone desert graves and carven tombs of kings . . .
So reigns Don Carlos in his dwelling-place.

May never years conspire to dispossess
Don Carlos of his goodly heritage,
And may he never know the loneliness
So often writ upon the final page,
But find his work — knowing no pause between
This star and those that round the mighty plan,
Singing forever in that blue demesne,
The heart-song of the builder, and the man.

AN INDIAN PURSE

AN Indian purse, a beadwork ornament;
And bright upon the buckskin's tawny gold,
In color-magic, boldly eloquent,
A song is wrought and legends manifold.

A touch of azure for the western sky;
Wine-red of sunset, yellow mesa-bloom;
Purple of ancient rites, ensombered by
The black of questioning silence, and the tomb.

Pale amethyst of dawn in desert-land;
Crimson of conquest, gray of temple stone;
Hue of the sage and dun of drifting sand,
Encircled by the white of the unknown.

Barbaric song empatterned clear and free,
Each measure cadenced by the color change;
And all symbolic of the Mystery
Forever old, forever new and strange.

Contrast, harmonious blending, savage grace,
Tradition reincarnate, ages mute,
Triumph, despair, enduring pride of race,
A treasure purse — the beadwork of the Ute.

Saddle Songs

Chief, from your gift, historic in its theme,
The thong is loosed that this my song may wend
Out from the desert tipi where I dream,
Across the snow-locked plain to you, my friend.

THE LAST SONG

My last song shall be Rob's song, the last that I shall sing;
Rob, kin to a fighting clan, Rob, who is son of a king:
Oh, Rob's hand it smote me, and Rob's hand it gave,
And Rob's heart — I'll take it down with me to the grave.

For Rob shall stand on the hillside, and he shall see the sun,
And he shall smell the tang of pine when the day has just
begun,

And he shall dream of the long trail, and at the last shall
say:

“Old friend and true friend, where do you ride, to-day?”

And never a pine shall answer and never a rock shall speak,
Yet Rob shall feel the hot tear that burns along his cheek;
And Rob shall curse like a stalwart because of a foolish
tear,

Curse for the sake of an old friend who is not there to hear.

My first song was Rob's song, the red of his lusty heart,
And my trail is Rob's trail, though we dwell the world
apart:

Oh, the real hills are ghost hills from the sea to the desert-
rim,

And the ghost hills are real hills that I have sung for him.

Saddle Songs

And I am but a wastrel and want nor fame nor gold,
For out of the millions journeying the heart of a man I
hold,

A great heart, a strong heart; and hardly have I known
When Rob's song was my song, and my song was his own.

You boast of faith in a high priest, a woman, or a creed:
But count the human hearts you hold — and the human
hearts you need!

And sad will be the reckoning, if you do but stop to look —
At best the half of a woman's heart, or the word of a musty
book.

Count them off on your fingers; one for the son and heir,
One for the daughter, a woman grown, lissome and sweet
and fair;

Count them off on your fingers; daughter and son and wife,
And each is living a life alone — and yours is a lonely life.

Rob shall stand on the hillside and feel the chill of Night,
Then shall he turn to The Highway and read the stars
aright:

For my first song was Rob's song, the red of his lusty heart,
And my last song shall be Rob's song, though we dwell the
world apart.

A THOUSAND MILES OR SO

ONE cords his roll and hits the trail, another hauls the
bending sail,

Another rides the Flying Mail but nearest to my know-
ing,

Of all the Hoboes high and low, who journey swift or jour-
ney slow,

Is he who hears the grasses grow and sings upon his going.

• • • • • • • • • •

When dots of silver velvet climb the pussy-willow tree,

And blackbirds shuttle through the sedge before the
sedge is green,

I sniff the spring in bud and marsh and then I long to be,
The other side of anywhere to view another scene.

The morning hills are misty blue and glimmering in the sun,
And sunlight glints along the rail — a highway that I
know,

But what about the hills beyond where summer has begun,
The other side of over there a thousand miles or so?

One season calls another on — that seems to be the plan;
The crocus and anemone have whispered to the grass,
Till leaves invisible grow brave — then what about a man,
Should he stuff cotton in his ears and watch the seasons
pass?

Saddle Songs

I have a book, a little book smooth-bound in leather stout,
 Yet stoutest leather never bound Ulysses to his chair,
And Homer never kept his house but wandered round about,
 So what's to keep the book and me from journeying anywhere?

I have a dog, a smallish dog whose pedigree and tail
 Are short — nor ever made to flaunt with pride upon
 the breeze;

He loves the shadow that I cast on road or field or trail;
 Should we be less adventurous than all his many fleas?

I have a stick, a gnarly stick that fits a fellow's hand,
 Not overlight for argument, or heavy to a stride;
Economy to utilize and sloth to let it stand,
 So why not tap the road again and view the countryside?

There's money had along the way in wallet, safe and till,
 And work for any handy man whose eye is never down;
To swing an axe or mow a lawn is not against my will —
 A town's a dire essential, but there's road beyond the town.

And then, on every stretch of road some cottage window
 gleams,
The shaded lamp behind the pane is not the only light;
Most folk who live afar from men are friendly, so it seems,
 And welcome news with bread-and-milk, and lodging for
 the night.

A Thousand Miles or So

To importune the hesitant with piteous complaint,
May serve a most immediate need to oil the rusty wheels,
But why, for luckless venturing, condemn an absent saint?
Not only Homer struck the lyre when hunger dogged his
heels.

I'll out and follow summer past the melons and the corn,
Or if need be, take the present, if the fence is builded
low —
With book and dog and stick, and bless the day that I was
born,
To delight in such companions for a thousand miles or so.

RAIN-MAKERS

WHERE the rattler coils in the yucca shade and the lizard's
hue is bright,
Where the riven sandstone holds the heat through the
hours of the desert night,
South and South of the Hopi line — South of the Navajo,
The shattered walls of a ruin stand — a village of long ago.

A puncher seeking a water-hole that his thirsty horse might
drink,
Reined to the edge of the salt-white glare on the rim of a
desert sink,
Gazed at the ruins banked with sand as he topped a
rounded rise,
And a vision of ancient Hopi Land grew clear in his steady
eyes.

The arrowhead, the painted shard, and the ash of a van-
ished flame;
Roofs long fallen that choked the rooms — a village with-
out a name . . .
He thought of the hopes and joys and fears that this pa-
tient people knew,
Lost in the vagrant sweep of years, believing their gods
were true.

Rain-Makers

“They prayed for rain,” the puncher said, “and I reckon if
I knew how,
I’d rustle a little prayer myself, for we sure need rain right
now;
And here are the deer and turkey bones which shows that
they liked their meat,
And here are some busted grinding-stones for the corn they
used to eat.”

Then he found a bead, a turquoise bead, blue bright on the
littered sand,
And he pictured a dusky Hopi girl, a beauty of Hopi Land,
When the long-dry cañon river-bed was cool with a crystal
flow,
And she swayed to the brimming olla’s weight on the foot-
worn trail below.

What if the puncher went to sleep in the shade of the ruin
wall,
While his pony dozed in the noonday sun with the blue
sky over all?
What if he saw the Hopi folk do a primitive rain-prayer
dance,
With symbol of turtle, snake and gourd and the lightning’s
broken lance?

Then the far hills shouldered a thunder-head, the light
grew dim and strange,

Saddle Songs

A shaft of blue went hurtling through and echoed from range to range;
The puncher opened his sleepy eyes and gazed at the distant plain,
A storm-black line on the desert rim, and the welcome tang of rain.

He thought of his homestead down the creek and the cracked and thirsty earth,
He thought of his cattle, gaunt and weak in the season's drought and dearth;
The withered truck in his garden-patch that fought with the summer heat,
As he sniffed the rain, the saving rain, and its smell was cool and sweet.

Snug in his shack he made a fire, had supper and rolled a smoke,
Doorway open he viewed the storm and visioned the Hopi folk . . .
Searched his pockets to find a match and found in his hand instead,
The thin, blue ring of a turquoise bead and a jet-black arrowhead.

HERMIT'S HOME

ON the crest of a far-seen range where heaven's arch swings
low,

Above the shouldering clouds in a land that few men know,
Where the great rams tread the height, where the dawn's
first arrow gleams,

There in the winds of day and night I builded my house of
dreams.

To the world I pay my debt of toil in the valley field,
Taking a dole for my little need of the red earth's autumn
yield,

I earn the right to live, though my years be brief or long,
And I earn the fair delight to give myself to the world in
song.

Because I do not yearn for an empire dim and far,
But leave the last to the laws that be for earth and sun and
star,

I know a brave content while the mountain seasons run,
In the stride of the rounding firmament, in work to do, and
done.

I have looked in the sun and it does not blind my eyes,
For nevermore shall I fear the Flame — I have flown where
the eagle flies;

Saddle Songs

My soul is bequeathed to space, my heart to my fellow
men;

I know my worth and I know my place as the stars return
again.

My worth — a grain of dust that the wind shall blow away,
My place wherever the dust may fall and that no man may
say,

Perchance on some argent shore, perchance in abysses
hurled,

To spin in the void for evermore, an atom, a star, a world.

SONG OF THE GRAY STALLION

My dam was a mustang white and proud,
My sire was as black as a thunder-cloud;
I was foaled on the mesas cold and high,
Where the strong ones live and the weak ones die,
And the mountain-lion steals:

Hid in the brush I knew no fear,
With a milk-white mustang grazing near;
When the grass grew green in the summer sun,
I learned to dodge and I learned to run,
And I learned to use my heels.

Sleek and strong and a stallion grown,
I took no pace that was not my own;
I fought for life in the winter storm,
And I fought for pride when the sun grew warm,
And the mares ran, calling shrill;

Then hot with the pride of my young desire,
I drove from the band my fighting sire;
My flanks dripped red but my crest was high,
For the young must live and the old must die,
Over hollow land and hill:

Saddle Songs

So if you think to down my pride,
Build a swift loop, cowboy, build it wide,
For I'm hard to catch and hard to tame,
I bear no brand, but I've earned my name,
The wild horse, stallion gray..

The mesa wind blows high and free,
But no wind that blows can outrun me;
You can sink your rowels out of sight,
And quirt your horse till his eye rolls white,
But I'll be far away.

DRINK DEEP

NEVER twice in the world you find,
A lad whose heart is the gold you spend,
And his free hand of your heart, in kind,
When the joy of each is to give, not lend:
Yet one shall tarry and one shall sleep,
So while you stand in the sun, drink deep.

Soon, too soon shall the sunlight pass,
And one shall mourn in the starless night,
As he snaps the stem of an empty glass,
That brimmed of old with a brave delight:
And one of you twain must the vigil keep,
So while you stand in the sun, drink deep.

THE END

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